



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

COMITÉ D'AIDE AU DÉVELOPPEMENT / DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

Le Président
The Chairman

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To: DAC Delegates

**Workshop: Current Challenges for Development Evaluation,
University of Sussex, England, 2-3 October 2006**

I attended the second day of this workshop and chaired the final session. Hans Lundgren attended throughout, and I have included his thoughts of the event in this report.

The workshop brought together a good-quality selection of some 60 people either themselves from the evaluation community or with experience of the policy context for evaluation. Although, as so often, the majority were from OECD countries, there was an effective and articulate representation from developing countries, not least those of Anglophone Africa, demonstrating both the rising interest in evaluation by developing countries as opposed to just by donors, and an increasing capacity to pursue relevant approaches to results- monitoring and independent evaluation.

The first day of the workshop had already placed emphasis on the need to reorient evaluation in the direction of greater accountability to citizens of developing countries, while accepting the needs also of donors. But this was not the only challenge. Others included how to balance timeliness with rigour, whether there was a fundamental tension between evaluation for lesson-learning and evaluation for accountability, and how to take account of the political context within which evaluations take place, and, more generally, to promote more demand for evidence-based policies.

Methodological issues were also raised, not only the continuing debate on the scope for and limitations of randomised approaches (e.g. cost, lack of transferability of results from one context to another, and something called the “Hawthorne effect”, which means that people who know that they are being studied may change their behaviour), but how to evaluate systems and networks, and the scope for cutting the costs of evaluations.

On the second day, we were invited by David Booth (Overseas Development Institute) to face the problem that evaluation methods based on the classic “project” approach needed to adapt to programme-based approaches with a longer “data chain”, no ready-made counterfactual and a more complex programme logic. Did multi-donor and recipient-involving evaluations make it harder for evaluators to “rock the boat”? Should evaluators get closer to development researchers, not least in order to reconstruct the logic of the programmes being evaluated? An excellent account by Margaret Kakande of the Uganda Ministry of Finance of the issues around results monitoring and evaluation of the PRS in her country showed that Ugandan evaluators were developing good real-world experience of the approach, but also of the practical difficulties in applying it. If, as appeared to be the case, growth was not translating into better health outcomes, what approaches should be used to sharpen accountability



for results in health? Another presentation (by Zenda Ofir, former Chair of the African Evaluation Association argued that evaluation was too often carried out in a way that “dis-empowered” the communities targeted by the interventions being evaluated; that demand for evaluation was nevertheless growing, most obviously in Latin America but increasingly also in Africa, and that all this demanded a stronger Southern intellectual base.

Other presentations covered the evolution of evaluation in the UN system (Lucien Back, UNICEF) and the General Budget Support evaluation (its lead author, Stephen Lister, argued for its “theory-based” approach, with its complex “causality map”, as a basis for clarifying thinking and making it possible to provide policy advice in a timely way, even if a focus on pure rigour would have suggested a longer delay: an argument that applies also to the new effort to evaluate the results of the Paris Declaration). Robert Picciotto argued robustly for moving towards much more evaluation of OECD countries’ policies that impact on developing countries. His thought-provoking phrase was “Globalisation has raised the cost of policy incoherence”, a point well worth reflection. Sue Owen of DFID provided a number of case examples where evaluation had clearly influence policy and put aid evaluation in the broader context of a stronger approach to evidence-based policies across the UK Government – though rather disarmingly admitting that this did not often extend to trying out new policies on a pilot scale.

But in many ways the two strongest interventions I heard, though neither might be in the realms of “pure” evaluation, were from a Ghanaian civil society organisation (Sulley Gariba of the Institute for Policy Alternatives) and the South African Public Service Commission (Indran Naidoo). Gariba’s presentation was noteworthy for a very strong endorsement of the value of the African Peer Review Mechanism in his country as a means of opening up public space for debate. At the same time, more traditional evaluations had their place and should not be discarded. Naidoo’s presentation showed the serious attempts being made to hold public servants to account and radically change inherited patterns of (non-responsive) behaviour, at the cost of some high profile and tense disputes – a really worthwhile example of an attempt to push reform from within a government machine, but using outside pressures such as the media, and techniques such as scorecards and benchmarking.

In the final session I suggested that we concentrate on a few issues around demand for evaluation and greater accountability on the one hand and supply of evaluation on the other.

Discussion of the former again led to a strong emphasis on increasing the variety of those who commissioned evaluations: not resisting the continuing need for donors to see the programmes and projects they supported being subjected to evaluation, but balancing this with more commissioning by local actors.

On the supply side, strong arguments were made for greater professionalisation of evaluators (though David Booth expressed doubts about too hard and fast distinctions between evaluators and researchers, and Goberdhan Singh of CIDA argued that evaluations should always include specialists in the subject matter as well as trained evaluators), and for inducting other professionals (e.g. statisticians) in key principles of evaluation. The representative of the International Development Evaluation Association (“IDEAS”) said that his institution would pursue the matter of raising professional standards but in an incremental way.

It was clear in this discussion that the issue of building capacity should continue to be applied to donor and OECD-based institutions, but that the key objective was now to strengthen Southern capacity. While demand was evident in some countries, in many others nurturing demand would be necessary, and civil society could here play an important role in societal moves towards greater transparency and accountability and hence increase demand for evaluation of public programmes. This would be very consistent with the recurrent theme of the event that aid evaluation should move from being a donor-driven toolbox to a locally-owned way of improving evidence-based policy-making in developing countries. Indeed Eva Lithman, Chair of our Evaluation Network, suggested not only that donor evaluation departments should become more harmonised among themselves but that a target might be set for recipient-led evaluations. I noted the parallels here to the Paris Declaration, with its emphasis on ownership and alignment as well as harmonisation.



Overall, the event showed that the “evaluation business” does face serious challenges. What started out as a rather technocratic, essentially project-based model, driven by considerations of accountability to donors, is having to adapt to pressures from many more stakeholders, particularly but not only in developing countries, to accommodate:

- demands for quicker and more policy-relevant findings;
- various ideas for different methodologies;
- a widening of the field of evaluation from projects to sector and country-wide or even global programmes, networks and systems; and above all
- a radical increase in interest and capacity in developing countries.

The workshop facilitated a reflection on these challenges. The evaluation community – including the DAC Network – now needs to address who should do what in the light of the evolving situation, not least to ensure that core standards of objectivity, independence and rigour are maintained against the many pressures for compromises of one sort or another.

Yours sincerely

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